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Walker-Sermon, Jan. 7, 1863

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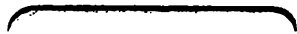


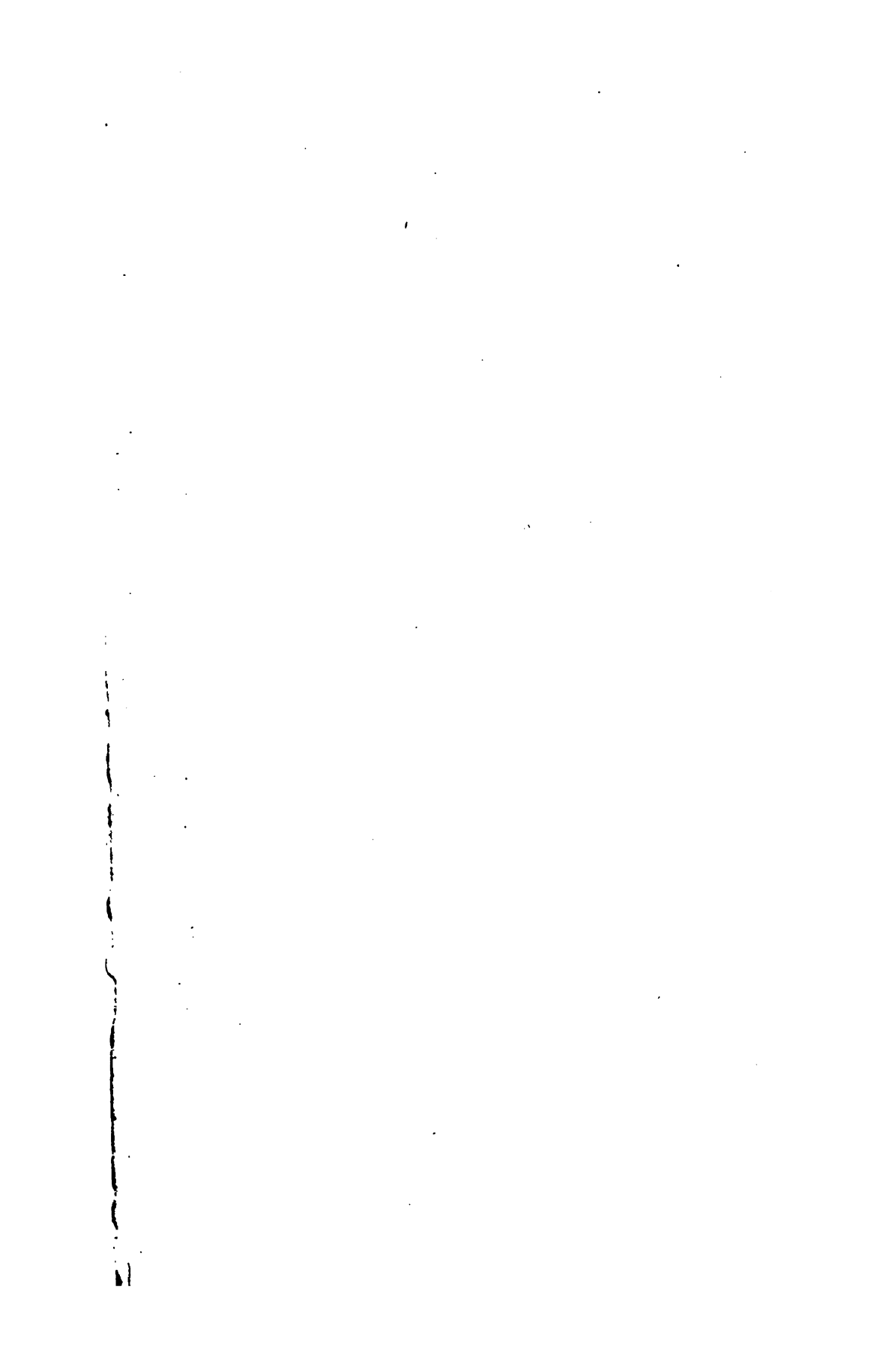
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A

# S E R M O N

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Executive and Legislative Departments

OF THE

GOVERNMENT OF MASSACHUSETTS,

AT THE

ANNUAL ELECTION,

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 7, 1863.

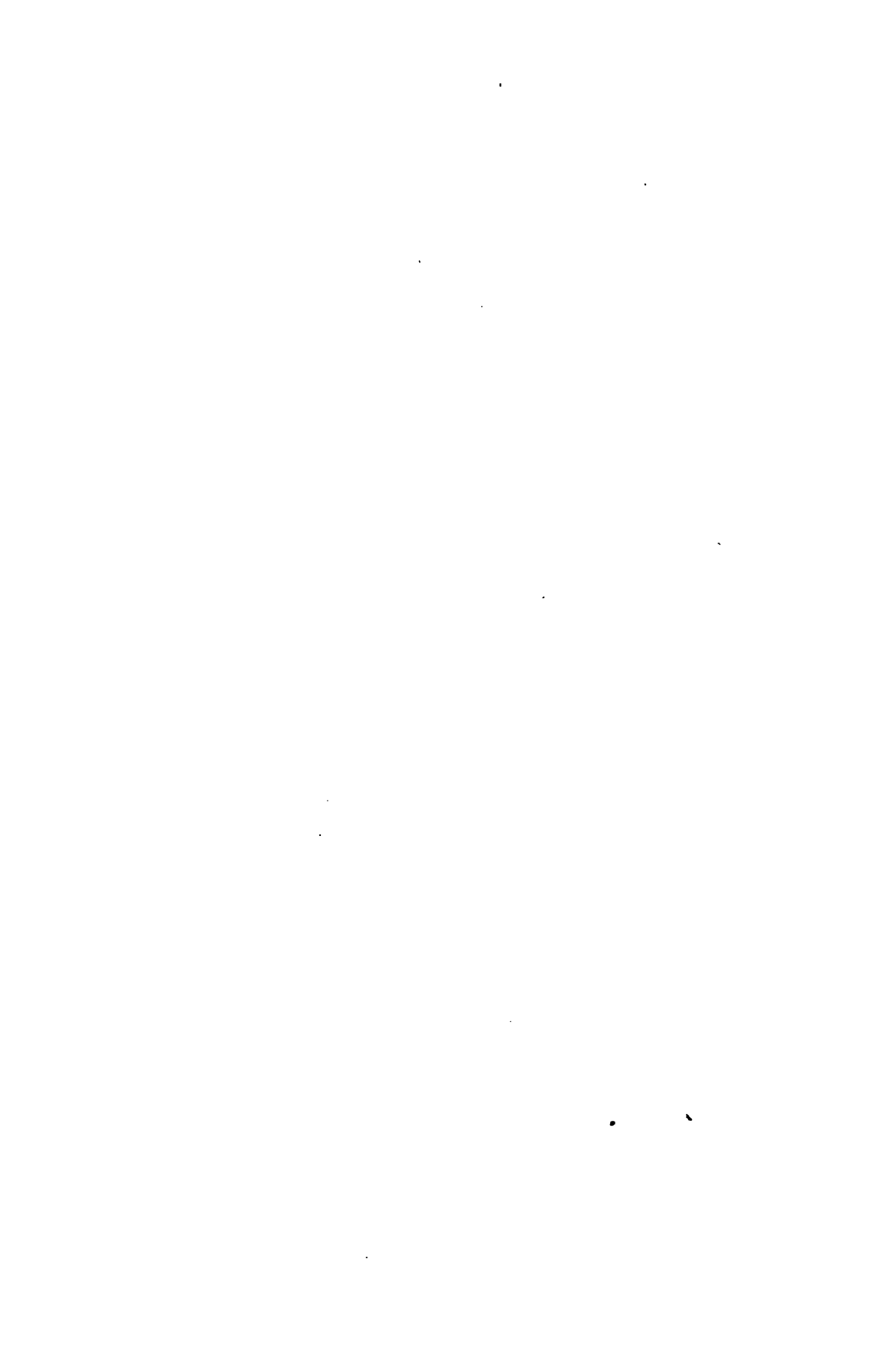
BY

JAMES WALKER, D. D.

BOSTON:

WRIGHT & POTTER, STATE PRINTERS,  
No. 4 SPRING LANE.

1863.



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## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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SENATE CHAMBER, BOSTON, January 9, 1863.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,—I esteem it a privilege to have been made the organ of communicating to you the inclosed Resolve of the Senate of Massachusetts; particularly so, as the sentiments expressed in your admirable discourse are such as I most heartily approve and believe to be eminently just.

I hope you will find it convenient to comply with the request of the Senate, so that all the citizens of the Commonwealth may have the benefit of the wise and conservative views taught in your excellent discourse.

With highest respect and regard,

I am, most truly,

PETER HARVEY,

*For the Committee.*

Rev. JAMES WALKER, D. D., Cambridge.

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CAMBRIDGE, January 12, 1863.

DEAR SIR,—I have had the honor to receive your note, inclosing an Order of the Senate requesting a copy of my Election Sermon for publication. I beg you to communicate to the Senate my acknowledgments for this expression of their favorable regard, and to inform them that a copy of the discourse is submitted to their disposal.

Very respectfully yours,

JAMES WALKER.

Hon. PETER HARVEY, Chairman of the Committee.



## Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

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SENATE, January 15, 1863.

The Committee to whom was referred the Order in relation to the printing of the Election Sermon preached before the Government of the Commonwealth on the 7th instant, have attended to the duty assigned them, and recommend the adoption of the accompanying Order.

For the Committee,

PETER HARVEY.

Accepted.

S. N. GIFFORD, *Clerk.*

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IN SENATE, January 15, 1863.

ORDERED, That eight thousand copies of the Election Sermon preached by the Rev. JAMES WALKER, D. D., before the Government of the Commonwealth on the 7th instant, be printed for the use of the Legislature.

S. N. GIFFORD, *Clerk.*



# S E R M O N .

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ISAIAH V. 3, 4.

AND NOW, O INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM, AND MEN OF JUDAH, JUDGE, I PRAY YOU, BETWIXT ME AND MY VINEYARD. WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE MORE TO MY VINEYARD THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT? WHEREFORE, WHEN I LOOKED THAT IT SHOULD BRING FORTH GRAPES, BROUGHT IT FORTH WILD GRAPES?

There is no shutting our eyes on the fact that we have fallen on times of trouble and perplexity. Things have not turned out as we hoped and expected they would, a year and a half ago; and this has very naturally given rise to a spirit of fault-finding. The Administration is blamed; Congress is blamed; the generals are blamed; the press is blamed; the pulpit is blamed; every-body and every thing is blamed, in its turn. But I do not see what good can come of this propensity to mutual recrimination, or of this desire to shift the burden on a single person, or class, or party.

Again, there are those who say that our calamities are a judgment of God for our sins, and seem, from their look and manner, to take a kind of satisfaction

in saying it. Perhaps they are right; but I do not see that any thing is proved. Besides I confess to some impatience at the haste with which a vain mortal, full of prejudices, thinks to read the purposes of the Almighty by the light of these prejudices. At the very best it is neither more nor less than a religious way of maligning one's neighbors, and as such is rebuked by the Great Teacher: "Those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay." As far as my observation has gone, temporal calamities, whether in the case of nations or individuals, are quite as likely to be the consequence of weakness, or folly, or mistake, as of conscious fault; and even when they are the consequence of conscious fault, they are its natural consequence. There is nothing like a special judgment; it is still cause and effect.

In attempting, therefore, to account for and explain the present unhappy and distracted state of the country, I shall leave it to the Searcher of Hearts to determine what is *sin*, and what is *judgment*; it is enough if I can see how events have been connected together as *cause and effect*. Moreover, I am not going to speak of exciting and proximate causes, about which you have heard so much, but of remote

and predisposing causes, underlying all others and giving effect to all others. Should it be objected, at the outset, that what men are now anxious to know is not the cause of the national malady, but its cure, I answer, that to know the former is one step towards knowing the latter, and the first step.

To meet the subject fairly we must begin, I think, by acknowledging a general decay of what may be termed the *civic* virtues,—a decay which has been going on for many years, affecting all parties and all classes. You will understand me to speak here of the civic virtues alone: in other respects I believe the community has been slowly improving, growing more moral, more religious, more humane. Even the hackneyed charge that our commercial spirit has degenerated into a mercenary spirit, is no farther true than this, that the pursuits of a people give form to their vices. Where all, from the highest to the lowest, are eagerly intent on bettering their condition, you must not wonder if you occasionally meet with instances of over-reaching, of sordid avarice, of vulgar display. But let no one presume to assert or insinuate, on the strength of this, that the tendency on the whole has been downward; that people in general have become less public spirited; that the standard of probity or honor has been lowered. It is

not so. Your flourishing public institutions, the reformatory movements of the day, the increased activity of Christians of all denominations in doing good, these thousand ministries in behalf of the children of want, suffering, and oppression, all testify that it is not so. Nothing is gained by a senseless and indiscriminate railing at what is called modern degeneracy. I repeat my concession: for the last fifty years the people of this country, or at least of this section of it, have, as it seems to me, been growing better, and not worse, in most respects. But I am obliged to make an exception of one entire class of virtues; those, I mean, which have their foundation in a true loyalty, in a proper reverence for government and law.

If the evil here complained of were confined to the vicious part of society, it might make the execution of the laws more difficult, but it would not cause the laws themselves, or those who make and administer them, to be looked upon with indifference or contempt. Unhappily, however, the defection of which I now speak pervades, more or less, all classes, and is owing, in no small measure, to opinions, theories, and practices countenanced by good men.

Even our unexampled and uninterrupted prosperity has indirectly contributed to it. Until the recent

outbreak no amount of maladministration has been found perceptibly to impair this prosperity; from which sensible and well-disposed men have hastily concluded that civil government, well or ill administered, at least in a country like ours where the people are self-governed, is not of much consequence after all. In this way government generally, except, perhaps, that part of it which is represented by the local police, has lost in their eyes, little by little, the support derived from a sense of its sacredness and necessity. They have been led not only to take less and less interest in it, but also to feel less and less anxiety about it,—content to build up each one his own private fortune, and leaving it for those who have nothing better to do to look after the State.

Extravagant and impracticable notions of liberty have also done their part. A considerable element of our population is foreign, consisting of persons who have come here to escape oppression or hardship. It is quite natural that many of them should look on all government, as such, with disfavor, or, what in practice amounts to nearly the same thing, that they should slide into the error of making a free government to mean liberty, and nothing else. A free government mean liberty, and nothing else! This would be to forget that government is neither a

sentiment, nor an opinion, nor a theory, but an institution, a fixed fact. A free government is an attempt to *secure* to the people a well-regulated liberty by certain guarantees; that is to say, by certain restrictions and limitations, by certain checks and balances. Accordingly, what is essential to a particular free government, to ours, for example, considered as a government, is not that it secures liberty, for all free governments do that; but the *means* it takes to secure it; that is to say, its peculiar restrictions and limitations, its peculiar checks and balances. Whoever sets himself to overturn these, may be true to his own notions of liberty, but he is not true to the government. It is not loyalty, but disloyalty; the effect of which, so far as it is successful, must be essentially to change the genius and spirit of the Constitution, and even the type of liberty, bequeathed to us by our fathers.

Add to this a spirit of insubordination induced by a mistaken regard for conscience, and for what is called the Higher Law.

Nobody doubts the reality of a higher law than that of the State; namely, law as it exists to the Divine Mind, or absolute right. But in the controversies on this subject we should always bear in mind that human laws are not compared, strictly speaking, with

this higher law, but with what the objector *takes* to be this higher law. The question, therefore, considered as a practical one, resolves itself at last into this: not whether we are to obey men rather than God, but whether we are to accept the State's interpretation of the will of God, or the individual's interpretation of the will of God, both interpretations being fallible. If you say, we may accept one or the other, as we see fit, I would reply by simply asking you to reconcile this, if you can, with any Christian, or rational, or practicable view of civil government. We are social beings; consequently we cannot live *as men* except in society; and we cannot live in society except under some form of civil government. Civil government, therefore, is not an accident, nor a convenience, but a necessity—made such by the nature which God has given us. It is just as certain that God made us *to be governed*, as it is that he made us to stand upright, or to speak. For this reason human governments are everywhere spoken of in Scripture as a divine ordinance. Government, however, to be government in any proper sense of that word, must be clothed with authority to decide contested questions of right;—not, indeed, as being infallible, but as being the authorized and accepted *umpire*.

But what is to become, meanwhile, of the individ-

ual's conscience, if it still protests against the law? Am I not bound to be faithful to my own conscience? Unquestionably; and this, too, in all cases, at any sacrifices, come what may. But all is not conscience that passes for it in this world. And here I do not refer to false appearances or false pretences alone. A man may be sincerely devoted to a particular measure, or system, or party, and be ready to make great sacrifices for it, and even to die for it; yet not for conscience' sake. It may be, and beyond question often is, the pride of opinion, or mere persistency or obstinacy of character. There are multitudes with whom a stiff adherence to ground once taken has very little to do with morality in any way: it has a great deal more to do with *temper*. Hence it is that you can hardly fall into a greater mistake than to suppose that zeal argues, of itself, extraordinary conscientiousness; it much more frequently argues extraordinary self-confidence and presumption, and a determination to have one's own way. Consider, for one moment, what extraordinary conscientiousness implies. It implies extreme anxiety to *be* right, as well as to *do* right; and wherever this anxiety exists, it cannot fail to induce some degree of caution, hesitancy, self-distrust. The zealot, therefore, who rushes on, manifesting none of this caution, none of this hesitancy or self-dis-

trust, may be a man of courage and daring ; he may count his life a very small thing compared with the objects he has in view ; he may be the man for the hour ; he may strike hard, and strike home ; but it is a palpable inconsistency to single him out as illustrating the power of conscience. In nine cases out of ten, it is the power of *will*.

There is also another point of view under which we should take care to clear up our conceptions of conscience, before appealing to it against law. Conscience, considered exclusively as a moral faculty, belongs to our emotional, and not to our intellectual nature. It is a sensibility, and not a judgment,—a feeling that we ought to do right, leaving us, however, to make up our opinion as to what *is* right in each particular case, as we make up our opinion on other subjects, and with the same liability to difference, to change, to mistake. Hence it often happens that we entertain a sincere respect for a man's conscience, that is, for his *sense* of right, but no respect at all for his *opinion* of right. The reason is, that the value of a man's opinion of right, either to himself or to others, is not measured by the degree of his conscientiousness, but by the degree of his intelligence, and of his intelligence respecting the matter in question. Thus there is no inconsistency in maintaining that a

man's *conscience*, that is to say, his desire and purpose to do right, will often not only allow but constrain him, especially in large and complicated affairs with which he is but little conversant, to submit his own *opinion of right*, however confident and sincere, to that of those who are better informed.

It is with a clear understanding of the distinction here pointed out, that we should take up the question, What is a man to do whose "opinion of right" is in conflict with law? After all, the question is not, as many would have it to be, between right and wrong, between conscience and no conscience; but between two conflicting "opinions of right," both of which are fallible. Under a free government like ours, law, to be law, must be taken as an expression, not of arbitrary will, but of the public opinion of right, and indeed of the public conscience as at present instructed. When, therefore, we conclude to obey law, it is not to forsake conscience in order to follow some other guide. We still follow conscience, and not the less conscience because the collective conscience of the community. Yes, but, in the case supposed, am I not called upon to give up my own conscience in favor of this so-called public conscience? No such thing. I am not even so much as called upon to give up my own "opinion of right," when it differs from

that expressed in the law. All that I am called upon to do is simply to hold such an opinion in abeyance ; and this too, no farther and no longer than my own conscience, in a proper view of my duty as a good citizen, prompts and requires.

The people cannot complain that they have been left in the dark as to this matter. Wise men have warned them, again and again, what would be the end, if the public ear should become accustomed to hear government and law spoken of in a spirit of defiance or of levity ; and that end, or rather the beginning of it, is upon us now. We take a superficial view of the civil war, which is bringing so much distress on this country, if we think to account for and explain the whole, by ascribing it, as some do, to slavery, or, as others do, to anti-slavery. Either this controversy would not have arisen, or it would have been comparatively harmless, if the ties, which once bound us firmly together as one people, had not been rotting away for years under the influence of an unhealthy and disloyal tone of public sentiment.

Thus far I have spoken of changes which have been going on in the public mind. Meanwhile, changes equally important have also been going on in the government itself, or, at any rate, in the manner and spirit with which the government is provided for and

administered,—all tending, unhappily, in the same direction.

We hear a great deal about restoring the Union as it *was*. I am tempted to ask, As it was *when*? The theory of our government would seem to be, that the people, self-moved and guided by unerring instincts, will choose the fittest men for office; and that these men, acting under the best lights they can obtain, will conduct the public affairs with a single eye to the good of the whole country, free alike from inside bias, or outside pressure. And for more than a whole generation this theory was carried into effect, as nearly as any such theory is likely to be in a world like ours. Since then, step by step, new principles, new measures, new policies have been introduced, giving an entirely new character to the working of some of the most cherished of our institutions. Witness the powers now assumed by our political conventions to determine every thing in advance, often having the effect to nullify express provisions of the Constitution. Witness the practice of making availability, and not merit, the test of candidateship, and the openly avowed doctrine, that “the spoils belong to the victor.” Do not suspect me of charging these innovations on this party or that: they have been adopted or acquiesced in by all parties; yet I have never

found an enlightened member of any party, prepared to defend them, except, perhaps, as necessary evils. But if necessary, why not from the beginning? at any rate, whether necessary or not, they are still evils, and their effect is the same.

How essentially anti-democratic these changes are, is evident from the fact, that they take the conduct of affairs almost entirely out of the hands of the people. To be sure, the forms of a free suffrage are left us, and this suffrage has been more and more extended; but to what purpose, if the whole is merely to sanction a foregone conclusion agreed upon elsewhere. A printed list of names is thrust upon me, which I transfer to the ballot-box, with the not very pleasing or flattering consciousness, that I am *used* by somebody, I know not whom, for some purpose, I know not what. Nor does the evil end here. If the power which is thus taken from the people were made over to the government, what is lost to Liberty might be gained to Order. But it is far otherwise. The power is made over to a set of men, well-meaning and intelligent, perhaps, but acting, for the most part, out of sight, under no official responsibilities, whose function it is to manufacture an artificial public opinion to which people and government alike are expected to submit.

Out of this state of things have grown the party and sectional jealousies and irritations which have had so much to do with our present troubles. The sharp conflicts of party are always full of danger to a free people; especially where there are no solid and enduring structures, as in a mixed government like England, around which the struggle is carried on. With us, it is as if two or more nations, in one nation, were contending which should be *the* nation,—all sense of a proper nationality being thus confused, if not lost. Placed in this false relation to each other, it is not strange that parties can be so wrought upon as not to know each other. In reading the accounts of what is said and done at the South, I am not offended, I can hardly say I am disappointed, at the courage and constancy, manifested amidst great sacrifices and privations for what they have been made to believe is right. These are qualities which I can admire even in a foe. But I am filled with mingled sorrow, disgust and dismay, when I see the false views and intense hate entertained there against the Free States, not merely by the principal actors in the rebellion, but by clergymen and women,—many of them our own brothers and sisters and children, our own flesh and blood. Nevertheless we must be just. I do not ascribe this unnatural and unrighteous

alienation of the Southern mind to a spontaneous movement among the people, nor to the legitimate working of our institutions. It is the accursed fruit of the irresponsible, under-ground machinations of the leaders of party.

Nor is this all. A few years ago, when the eminent statesmen and civilians of the last generation were passing away in quick succession, it was the fashion to say, that the race of great men was dying out in this country. To give this opinion, supposing it to have been seriously entertained, even so much as the semblance of truth, it would be necessary to assume that all proper greatness belongs to public life. Nobody pretends that there has been, or is likely to be, any falling off in the talent or genius manifested in other fields of human activity. We never had greater men in science, in learning, in art; we never had greater lawyers, or greater merchants, or greater engineers. Evidently, therefore, the problem to be solved is not, why men of large capacity have failed us, but why such men are so apt to turn aside from politics, and devote themselves to other pursuits. It is because the new doctrines and new policies have had the effect to make an enlightened and experienced statesmanship a disqualification for the highest offices in the National Government. Not the fittest, but the

most available candidate is sought for, one who will revive no grudges, awaken no jealousies, a new man, and above all, a man who is not a power in himself. Thus all the candidates educated for the place are passed over ; and what is worse, a policy is inaugurated which makes it certain that soon no such candidates will be left. Hence the answer to the often repeated question, by which it is thought to silence complaints against official incompetency,—Where can you find better men? Where, indeed! You can find good men and great men ; but why wonder that you cannot find great statesmen, men educated and trained for public life, men who have already won the public confidence, and whose names are in every-body's mouth,—why wonder that this is impossible, when you have been pursuing for years a course which has made it impossible?

The best answer to those who take alarm at the mention of great men, who think their ascendancy in Republics is neither necessary, nor consistent, nor safe, is found in the annals of our own country. Go back to the struggle for independence. I do not forget the virtues of the people of that day, both men and women ; nor their sacrifices and sufferings, with which ours, at present endured, are not worthy to be compared ; nor their heroic bearing.

But all this would have come to nothing, a melancholy waste of noble purpose and precious life, without the presence and agency of a few commanding minds to give a wise direction to the movement and inspire confidence and unity. So, likewise, at the adoption of the Federal Constitution. That instrument, as it had to reconcile conflicting views and interests, could not avoid compromises, and it is always easy to make compromises, however just and necessary, the ground of popular discontent. Nothing but the most strenuous exertions on the part of such men as Hamilton, Madison, and Jay were able to induce its acceptance, thereby securing the union and consolidation of the States, without which independence at that time would have been a questionable blessing. Strange indeed that the countrymen of Washington, who owe so much to the transcendent influence of one man in war and in peace, whose whole history is lighted up with the splendor of one immortal name, should ever come to doubt the spell of a true greatness. It cannot be. There is not an honest and thoughtful patriot throughout the loyal States, who has not the prayer on his lips every day, every hour, that God would vouchsafe to us another Washington to reanimate and reassure the waning hope and faith of the nation. We have been mocked by vain words, until the whole

head is sick and the whole heart is faint. Oh that the exigency would call forth a man who is equal to it, a truly great man, universally felt and acknowledged to be such, who would know what is coming and how to prepare for it,—to whom we should all gladly look up, on whom we could all safely lean.

If I am right in what has been said, there are two sets of influences which have long been at work to demoralize the politics of this country; one, with speculative men, undermining the old reverence for the Constitution and the laws; the other, with practical men, substituting loyalty to party for loyalty to the State; the joint effect of both being to weaken the government, and at the same time to bring a succession of strains upon it, heavier and heavier, until at length it has given way.

Where, then, is our hope? Not, certainly, in empty boasts, or empty threats on our part; and still less in a disposition to underrate and despise the power opposed to us. We have had a great deal too much of this already, and the frequent disappointments occasioned thereby have done more than all other causes put together to induce at times a feeling of utter distrust, that sinking of the heart of a whole people, which is worse than a hundred defeats. Our hope is to be found, as it seems to me, in the change

of character and purpose which the public dangers and trials are likely to affect in all classes and all parties. If for a whole generation we have been trifling with our liberties, and making a game of politics, it is because our liberties had cost us nothing, and we thought them safe. Peril, calamity, mortification, will bring us to our senses again. *Will* do it, did I say? they have already begun to do it. God forbid that we should sit here moaning over this new and unnatural assault on the integrity and the very existence of the nation, without a word, or a thought, for those who have sprung forward to its defence,—the heroic living and the heroic dead. The young life of the country, which has been laid by willing hands on the altar; families throughout the land, weeping over the lifeless or mutilated forms of those who were but yesterday the light and stay of their homes, but not repining; hospitals filled with the sick and wounded, but, as it is said, almost without an expression or look of regret or despondency; a sanitary provision, which unites all hands and all hearts, rich and poor alike, men, women and children, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, in fulfilling, on a scale never witnessed before, that great law of Christian sympathy, “whether one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it,”—do not these things proclaim the revival of the public virtue

of our best days? A few years ago there were those who would tell you, that patriotism, that love of country, was not a virtue, but a temptation. I should like to see the man who would dare to stand up and say that now.

I am no prophet, to speak with confidence of coming events. All things are in the hands of God, who will accomplish his own ends, in his own way, and in his own time. Thus much, however, is plain: there is nothing in an unnatural and wicked attempt to destroy the Union which should shake our confidence in free institutions. Indeed, the very danger by which the *federate* principle is now menaced has had the effect to bring out new evidence of the strength and endurance of the *democratic* principle. When we reflect how unprepared we were for the struggle, that our leaders have not been such as to inspire special confidence, that we have not been intoxicated and carried away by a series of brilliant victories, and, at the same time, that unexampled sacrifices of property and life have been called for, and freely given,—who will say that any other form of government would have stood it as well? And even if this hope should fail, we have another: we cannot doubt the final result towards which all these things are slowly and darkly tending, in the Divine

purpose. So long as we believe that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Heavenly Father, we cannot fear that a single great principle, once born into this world, will ever be suffered to die. Not a tear, not a drop of blood, is shed in vain. I believe in human progress; otherwise, I should not believe in any thing. I believe that He who holdeth in his hands the issues of all events, who putteth down one nation and setteth up another, is making the saddest bereavements, and the most appalling scenes, the follies, the vices, the madness of men, work together for good;—until right is established, until every yoke is broken, until “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.”

The day has returned for the annual re-inauguration of the government of this Commonwealth. His Excellency, the Governor, and all associated with him in offices of public trust, will receive our respectful salutations.

You have a right to regard it, Gentlemen, as a distinction and a privilege, to be called to serve the State in these anxious times. It is not unlikely you have made up an opinion on many of the subjects that are to come before you; but it is one thing to

make up an opinion with nothing depending on it, and quite another to make it up as the ground of a grave official act. The State, the whole country, will have a right to your "sober second thoughts." This would be true in ordinary times: how much more so in a crisis like the present, when the events of a single week, of a single day, will often have the effect to put an entirely new face on the public dangers and the public needs? And besides, we have recently had unmistakable indications that a difference of opinion prevails even in the loyal States as to the measures necessary and proper to save the country. Under these circumstances, I implore you to consider whether there can be the shadow of a hope that the country will be saved at all, unless in a spirit of mutual concession.

God is my witness, I take no joy in striving, or in witnessing strife; especially where the strife is between the friends of the Union, having no other effect than to make both parties impotent for good, that the common enemy may exult, and fight on, and triumph. With a united North, with a just, magnanimous, and conciliating policy, with a true, hearty and unconditional loyalty to the Government, all would yet be well. We should take from the instigators of secession what has been the secret of their confidence and

determined resistance from the beginning ; we should have at once, both the physical and the moral strength ; this nervous fear of foreign interference would be at an end ; in the stress of battle men would think they saw the venerated forms of the heroes of the Revolution fighting on our side ; and above the noise and confusion of human folly and human passion that Voice would again be heard, speaking as of old : “ For a small moment have I forsaken thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment ; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer.”

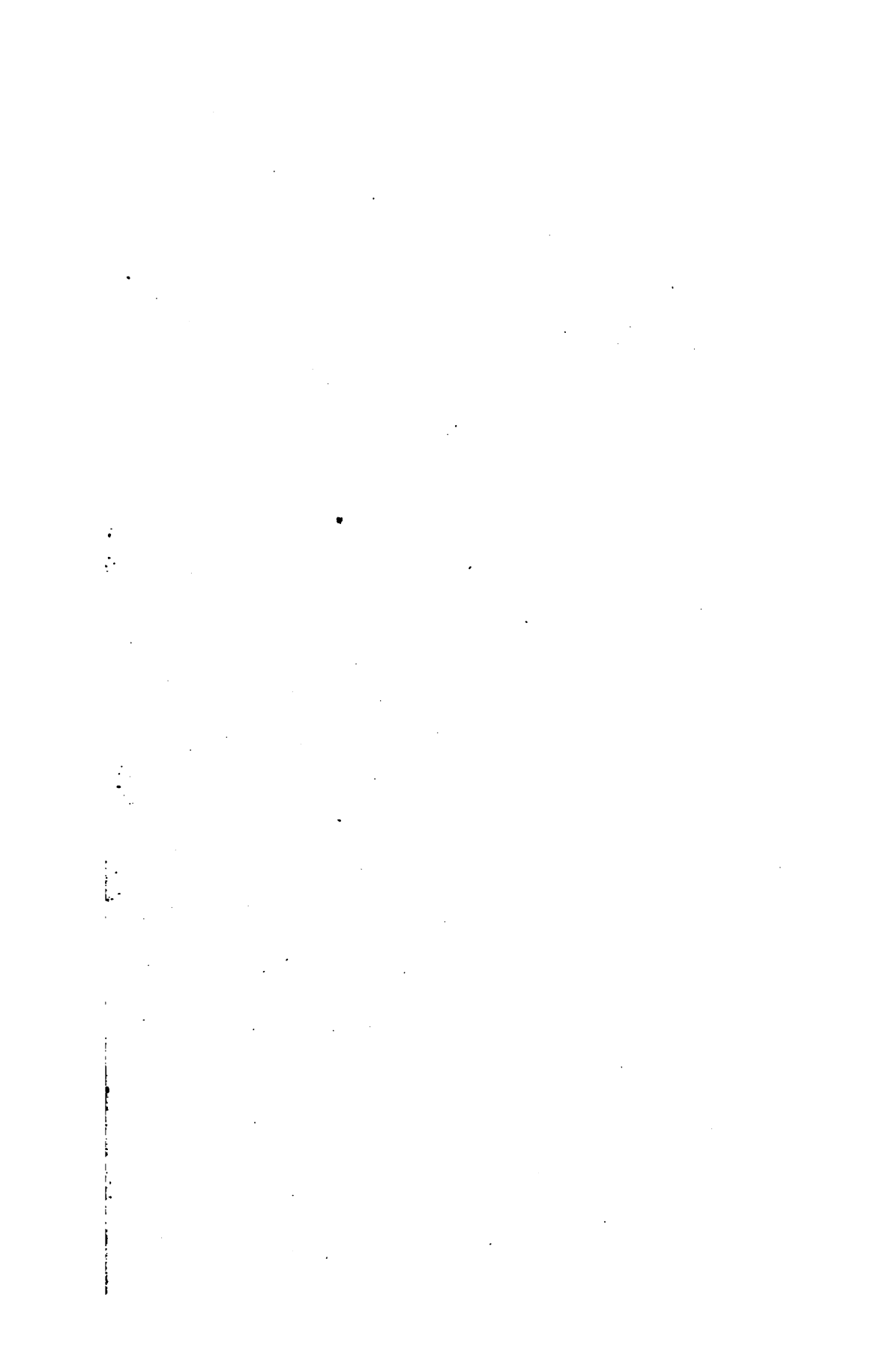








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